

State on right track to greener televisions

Monday, October 26, 2009



Walk into an appliance outlet and expect to see washers, refrigerators and water heaters all bearing labels stating their energy appetites. But a trip past the banks of flat-screen televisions is different: There are no such energy labels or limits on these consumer toys.

The California Energy Commission wants to rope in flat screens, following successful mandates that made refrigerators and washing machines far more efficient at no greater cost. It's a laudable goal but one that comes with a caveat: New rules shouldn't interfere with fast-changing TV technology and consumer tastes.

On balance, the commission is on the right road. It's gathering opinion on a two-stage program that will produce new flat screens that use half the juice of present models in four years. State regulators - and a number of major TV makers and major utilities - think this short deadline is achievable and won't mean higher prices.

Though the plan seems fast-tracked for passage, the Consumer Electronics Association, the major industry trade group, is opposed. Let the market regulate itself via energy-use stickers on the products and increasingly efficient products, the industry argues. Also, there's concern that the Sacramento commission will choke innovation with extra rules.

These arguments aren't convincing. If energy use is to be restricted, the state should set basic thresholds that balance cost and practicality. The Energy Commission is right to pursue its job in this direction.

Of equal concern is the issue of innovation. The crisp colors, wide screens and picture-frame depth of plasma and LCD models are remarkable - and took less than a decade to produce. Prices and features change by the month. The commission must stick to rule-making about energy usage and get out of the way of a rapid-running technology that is already researching a new generation of ever-sharper TVs.

A power diet

The California Energy Commission is drawing up energy usage rules for flat-screen TVs. Here are the basics:

California's 35 million TVs account for 10 percent of the residential electric bill, a number that's rising.

-- The rules would require new flat screens up to 58 inches to use a third less energy beginning in 2011 and half as much by 2013. TVs now in use would not be affected.

-- Consumers would save from \$10 to \$30 per year in utility bills with the new sets.

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/10/26/EDAT1A9TBI.DTL>

This article appeared on page **A - 18** of the San Francisco Chronicle

© 2009 Hearst Communications Inc. | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Feedback](#) | [RSS Feeds](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Contact](#)